

[By Dr. Paul Niehans]

Help from Animal Cells?

The way Dr. Paul Niehans, a stony-faced, ramrod-straight Swiss physician told it, his theory and practice of "cellular therapy" sounded plausible enough. Thirty years ago he had begun transplanting parts of animals (glands, and organs such as liver and kidneys) into human beings to correct dwarfism, tetany,* and other disorders resulting from underactive glands. But in 1931 he was confronted with a woman dying of tetany and too weak for the operation. So Niehans injected a mass of cells from the parathyroid gland of a freshly slaughtered calf.

"She is still alive today," Niehans last week told a twelve-nation conference of physicians at Karlsruhe, Germany. "Since then I have made 5,000 injections. I have found a means to cure those armies of persons bodily and mentally depressed, suffering from defective functioning of organs."

This brought orthodox, conservative doctors to the edge of their chairs and

* Muscular spasms, often caused by defective parathyroid glands.

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started the hottest argument of a hot week in Karlsruhe. Niehans, whom some of his colleagues called arrogant and authoritarian, laid down strict rules for his method. The younger the animal from which glands or cells were taken, the better. This meant using calves, piglets, or other young animals still unborn—taken from dams slaughtered just before they were due to litter. (At one time his patients had to go to slaughterhouses for treatment with fresh tissues, but a Heidelberg chemical company has found a way to preserve the cells in powdered form so that they keep indefinitely.) Niehans insists that his treatment must not be tried in cases of infection or other acute illness, and no other medication whatever must be given for several months after it.

Several doctors who have adopted the Niehans technique, giving injections of embryonic animal cells at costs ranging from \$3.50 to \$20, supported his claims. But others shook their heads. There are great dangers: allergic reactions, shock, accidental infection with viruses or other microbes. There is a good chance that the "placebo effect" (i.e. mental suggestion) is responsible for improvement in many patients. Others, especially those suffering from a transient form of tetany, get better spontaneously.

Niehans himself admitted: "I can only report what I have seen. Exactly what happens inside the body and the various organs I do not know. But I hope to have the solution one day."